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SUBJECT: OPENING OF DRC NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ORDINARY SESSION

¶1. (U) Summary. The DRC National Assembly's first ordinary session opened March 15. Initial priority items on the three-month agenda include final approval of the Assembly's internal rules, membership and election of officers of its permanent committees, and final confirmation of all deputies' mandates. Assembly leadership also hopes to consider draft laws on decentralization, the political opposition, the judicial system, the economic and social council and the 2007 budget. End summary.

¶2. (U) The DRC National Assembly opened its first three-month ordinary session in a ceremony at the Palais du Peuple March 15. It follows two special sessions, the most recent of which concluded February 28. It was attended by 355 of the 500 deputies as well as Prime Minister Gizenga and other ministers, members of the diplomatic community, including the Ambassador and SRSG William Swing, and delegations from the Gabonese and Angolan national assemblies.

¶3. (U) National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe highlighted achievements of the special session in his opening remarks. He cited the Assembly's review and approval of the government's five-year plan, establishment of a committee of inquiry into the January 31-February 1 Bas-Congo violence and of an audit committee on National Assembly properties, and consensus on dealing with the constitutional issue of dual nationality.

¶4. (U) He also detailed parliamentary diplomacy undertaken by the Assembly and its officers. Kamerhe led delegations to the France-Africa Summit in Cannes and to the inauguration of Catholic Archbishop Marcel Mabila in Kananga in February, an information science conference in Rome and meetings hosted by Spanish counterparts in Madrid in March. The Assembly also hosted the February 26-28 Great Lakes parliamentary conference.

¶5. (U) Kamerhe said the ordinary session agenda would give initial priority to unfinished items from the special session: final approval of the Assembly's internal rules, membership of its permanent committees and election of officers, and confirmation of the mandates of all deputies. He stated that the Assembly also plans to consider laws on decentralization, the political opposition, the judicial system, the economic and social council and the 2007 budget.

¶6. (U) Gabonese National Assembly President Guy Zuba was loudly applauded when he introduced some members of his delegation as "from the opposition." Following the applause, he said, "now I can identify where the opposition sits in this chamber," to general laughter. Angolan National Assembly First Vice-President Joao Lourenco also addressed the session, but as he spoke in Portuguese and there was no interpreter present his message was heard but not received.

¶7. (U) Comment. Once again, Kamerhe acquitted himself well. The ceremony began only a few minutes late (due only to the tardiness of the Angolan delegation), and his speech was well received. That said, Kamerhe and others in the Assembly leadership acknowledge that not all agenda items can possibly be addressed in a 90-day session. Setting priorities will therefore be all the more important. End comment.

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